

# Award-winning Alhambra adult education teacher gets pink slip

By Brian Charles, Staff Writer  
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Mary Torregrossa teaches a Beginning Low ESL Class at Southeast Community Adult School in Rosemead Friday May 21, 2010. Torregrossa received a pink slip months ago from Alhambra Unified School District and doesn't expect to keep her job. She has been recently honored as one of the best adult education teachers in the state. (SGVN/Staff Photo by Walt Mancini)

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On the last day of school in June, teacher Mary Torregrossa will clean up her classroom for the very last time.

In her shopping bag, Torregrossa will pack pictures, pencils and highlighters along with a plaque from the California Council of Adult Education honoring her for excellence in teaching. She received the award on May 8. One week later, she got a final notice telling her she was losing her teaching job.

After 25 years of teaching, she hasn't figure out her next move.

"I have all this expertise and there is a demand for what I do, but I'm wondering where I'm going to use it," Torregrossa said.

She teaches English language education in the adult education program at the Alhambra Unified School

## Photo Gallery



School's out for award winning teacher

District, which will eliminate its English language classes for adults.

The district decided to make cuts to adult education and spare as many cuts to K-12 education as possible, district officials said in March.

"People say immigrants need to learn English and I say, 'Here I am, put me to work,'" Torregrossa said about the closing of the school.

Since learning of her fate in March, she has lost sleep and felt jittery about the prospects of going without a job.

"I look around and realize I am not alone in this," Torregrossa said. "There are a lot of other people going through the same thing."

She said she feels lucky that her husband has a job and the couple was conservative in their choice of

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homes.

"I've always envied the more modern homes," she said. "But when this happened, I was thankful that we have a home we can afford on one salary."

But Torregrossa said the students are the ones who will lose the most.

"This school makes it convenient for them to learn the language so they can communicate with people in their neighborhood or at their job," she said.

Gregorio Perez, 21, of Monterey Park, attends Torregrossa's class at the Southeast Community Adult School on Garvey Avenue.

"This is important for me for my future, so I can get a job," he said.

Perez immigrated from Guatemala three years ago and works in the kitchen at Marie Calendar's. He has no family, but boasts a slew of friends. English, Perez said, is the key to making more friends.

"I take classes so I can communicate with the people around me," Perez said, struggling to form the words.

Torregrossa said Perez is very different from many of her Latino students. Normally the Latino students learn to speak English with some proficiency before reading and writing. Perez can read and write with proficiency, but struggles with speaking.

Perez said he knows he needs the class and knows state budget cuts may eliminate the program.

"I'm not very happy right now," he said. "I am very sad, she is the No. 1 teacher."

Torregrossa said the time away from work may give her an opportunity to work on her other passion - poetry.

"I plan to submit more of my poetry to literary magazines and maybe I can get published," she said.

As far as her excellence in teaching plaque, Torregrossa said she plans to put it next to her computer where she composes her poetry.

"I'm always looking for a word here or there, or trying to figure out where the poem is going," she said. "I thought maybe the plaque would remind me of my time in the classroom and could inspire me."

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